

LESLIE WILKINSON

Gold-medallist 1960

Born 12th October 1882 in London, Leslie Wilkinson obtained his schooling at a private preparatory school and at St Edward's in Oxford. On leaving school he worked first for C. E. Kemp on stained glass before becoming an articled pupil of J. S. Gibson in 1901 and for three years. At the same time he attended five years of formal training at the Royal Academy and the Northern Polytechnic in London. In 1904 he obtained the Royal Academy Silver Medal and Travelling Scholarship and the next year the Gold Medal and Scholarship. Wilkinson used the scholarships to travel and study in France, Italy, and Spain, which gave him an abiding interest in Mediterranean architecture. Wilkinson also gathered the Arthur Cates Prize and the R.I.B.A. Silver Medal for measured drawings before beginning practice. In 1908 he joined the School of Architecture at the University College, London, as an assistant tutor

and later became an assistant professor. Commissioned into the London University Officers' Training College during the First World War, he arrived in Australia towards its end, in August 1918, to occupy the first Chair of Architecture in Australia—at the University of Sydney.

Wilkinson had become an Associate of the R.I.B.A. in 1907 and a Fellow and member of its council in 1918. On arrival in Australia he became a Fellow of the Institute of Architects of New South Wales and in 1921 was elected to its council. He served continuously until in 1933 he became its president. The next year the New South Wales Chapter was formed and Wilkinson became the first Chapter president. Wilkinson introduced a new approach to architectural education—full-time courses in which the intellectual and aesthetic education of students was more important than their technical training. He also introduced a fresh breeze into architectural design. Immediately aware of the similarity of Sydney's climate to that of Mediterranean Italy and Spain, he introduced the style of architecture that came to be known as Spanish Mission, which had a brief run of popularity in the 1920s. In his practice, which involved university master-plans and buildings at Sydney, Western Australia and Tasmania, halls, banks, schools, churches and many houses, Wilkinson erected some delightful and fresh buildings that have worn well with time. Two of them won the coveted Sulman Award.

But naturally enough Wilkinson's main contribution to the Australian architectural profession lies in his academic influence. Through how and what he taught his students during thirty years at the University of Sydney and through his voice on numerous advisory and consultative committees in the profession and the community at large he exerted an improving influence in the furthest cranny of Australian architecture.

As a mark of the debt it owed to Professor Leslie Wilkinson, the profession on his retirement in 1947 made him a Life Fellow of the R.A.I.A. In 1960 he received the first award of its highest honour, the Gold Medal. In 1961, when the New South Wales Chapter established a special award for domestic architecture, they named it after him. In 1969 he was honoured with an O.B.E. by the Queen and in 1970 with the degree of Hon. D.Litt. by the University of Sydney.